

USMC-USSOCOM Relationship: Does Increased Interoperability Necessitate Force Contribution?

CSC 2004

Subject Area National Military Strategy

Executive Summary

Title: USMC-USSOCOM Relationship: Does Increased Interoperability Necessitate Force Contribution?

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Thesis: This paper will examine the Marine Corps' past, present, and future relationship with Special Operations Forces (SOF). It accomplishes this by discussing the historical background of the unification of special operations under United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM); why the Marines Corps chose not to contribute forces to USSOCOM; how the relationship between the Marines Corps and USSOCOM has evolved; what the Marine Corps' current experiment in force contribution is; and what I believe the future relationship of the two organizations should be. Ultimately, this paper attempts to determine if interoperability between the Marine Corps and USSOCOM is sufficient or whether the Marine Corps should provide a permanent force contribution to USSOCOM.

Discussion: The failed hostage rescue attempt in Iran in 1979 and the special operations interoperability problems in Grenada in 1983 led to the enactment of the Cohn-Nunn Amendment to the DOD Authorization Act of 1987. This amendment established USSOCOM as a new unified command.

As USSOCOM was formed, the Marine Corps successfully resisted the assignment of forces by arguing that the Marine Corps did not possess any SOF. Instead, the Marine Corps pursued a MAGTF concept with some special operations capabilities.

From 1992 to 2001, USSOCOM and the Marine Corps maintained a limited relationship. Following the events of 11 September 2001, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was signed between the two organizations to examine current capabilities and missions, to establish an interface between staffs, and to synchronize warfighting developments.

Following the initial MOA, the Marine Corps offered a "proof of concept" force contribution to USSOCOM. The MCSOCOM Det consists of 87 Marine and Sailors organized into Headquarters, Fire Liaison, Reconnaissance, and Intelligence elements that deploys with a Naval Surface Warfare (NSW) Squadron in 2004.

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The future relationship of the Marine Corps and USSOCOM will benefit from increased interoperability through the USMC/USSOCOM Board, permanent and augment billets, exchange programs, and “real world” operations. Force Contribution provides the advantages of increasing jointness, fixing reconnaissance, reducing future cost, and alleviating some Marine Corps’ fears. Force Contribution also provides the disadvantages of redundancy in mission, cost in resources, creation of an “elite culture”, and presenting the myth of a “great” investment.

Conclusion(s) or Recommendation(s): I believe that through increased interoperability, the Marine Corps and USSOCOM can gain a better understanding of each organizations’ culture, abilities, and limitations. Closer ties will ultimately lead to a better combined force on the battlefield. As for force contribution, I do not believe it is in the best interest of the Marine Corps to pursue this initiative after the “proof of concept” test. Most of the advantages can be realized through increased interoperability without having to provide a “buy-in” to USSOCOM.

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Introduction

Special Operations – Operations conducted by specially organized, trained, and equipped military and paramilitary forces to achieve military, political, economic, or informational objectives by unconventional military means in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive areas. These operations are conducted across the full range of military operations, independently or in coordination with operations of conventional, non-special operations forces. Political-military considerations frequently shape special operations, requiring clandestine, covert, or low visibility techniques and oversight at the national level. Special operations differ from conventional operations in degree of physical and political risk, operational techniques, mode of employment, independence from friendly support, and dependence on detailed operational intelligence and indigenous assets.¹

The definition of special operations above clearly shows a distinction between specially organized, trained, and equipped forces as opposed to conventional, non-special operations forces. For years the Marine Corps has wrestled with this distinction. Is the Marine Corps a special force? Does the Marine Corps have special forces? Is the Marine Corps a conventional force that is uniquely capable of conducting some specialized operations? These questions among others have been debated for years. With a current National Military Strategy (NMS) designed to fight a War on Terrorism (WOT) and a Department of Defense emphasis on special operations, these questions have risen yet again to the forefront of topics in the Marine Corps.

This paper will examine the Marine Corps' past, present, and future relationship with Special Operations Forces (SOF). It attempts to accomplish this by discussing the historical background of the unification of special operations under United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM); why the Marines Corps chose not to contribute forces to USSOCOM; how the relationship between the Marines Corps and USSOCOM has evolved; what the Marine Corps' current experiment in force contribution is; and what I believe the future relationship of

¹ Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington DC: 12 April 2001), 397. <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddiet/index.html>

the two organizations should be. Ultimately, this paper will attempt to determine if interoperability between the Marine Corps and USSOCOM is sufficient or whether the Marine Corps should provide a permanent force contribution to USSOCOM.

Unifying Special Operations Under USSOCOM

U.S. national security requires the maintenance of Special Operations Forces (SOFs) capable of conducting the full range of special operations on a worldwide basis, and the revitalization of those forces must be pursued as a matter of national urgency.²

-Deputy Secretary of Defense
William H. Taft IV
3 October 1983

Following a significant and effective role during the Vietnam War, United States Special Operations Forces began a period of steady decline during the 1970s. Nine active Army Special Forces Groups shrank to three, SOF aircraft suffered similar cuts or reverted to the Reserves, and the Navy decommissioned its only special operations submarine.³ In addition to force reduction, SOF saw their budgets reduced, their manning levels drop below authorized strength, and a growing level of distrust from the conventional military. This combination of challenges led to an erosion of capabilities that would directly impact mission performance.

A key catalyst in highlighting the deficiencies of our Special Operations Forces was the failure of a clandestine rescue attempt of fifty-three Americans held hostage in Iran. On 25 April 1980, eight helicopters, twelve fixed-wing aircraft, and a group of special operators headed for Tehran to conduct Operation EAGLE CLAW. After a variety of challenges were faced at a rendezvous point known as “Desert One,” the mission was aborted. While “Desert One” was only a codeword used during Operation EAGLE CLAW, it became synonymous with special operations failure.

² Paul X. Kelley, General, USMC, “The Marine Corps and Special Operations,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1985, 22.

³ John M. Collins, *Special Operations Forces: An Assessment, 1986-1993* (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1994), 9.

Operation EAGLE CLAW was designed as a three-phased rescue operation. Phase 1 entailed an Army special operations assault force flying in C-130s from Germany and Egypt to a clandestine base in the Iranian Desert, approximately 500 kilometers southeast of Tehran. At this location, codenamed “Desert One”, the assault force would marry up with eight Navy RH-53D helicopters, flown by Marines from the carrier USS Nimitz in the Gulf of Oman. After the helicopters were refueled, they would transport the assault force to a location just outside of Tehran. Phase II entailed the assault force moving into the city under cover of darkness, rescuing the hostages, and recalling the helicopters to exfiltrate from the city. Phase III entailed the helicopters linking up with a C-141 at an airfield 50 kilometers south of Tehran. The airfield was to be secured by a detachment of Army Rangers while the rescue attempt was being conducted. At the airfield, the helicopters would be abandoned and the assault force and hostages would be transported by C-141 to safety.

Due to mechanical problems and a heavy dust storm, two of the helicopters aborted the mission early on. At “Desert One”, an additional helicopter experienced hydraulic failure. With only five helicopters remaining, and a minimum of six required to carry out the mission, the rescue attempt had to be called off. While the planes were attempting to refuel for the return, a RH-53D collided with a C-130 tanker. The resulting explosion killed five airmen, three Marines, and wounded dozens.

The “Desert One” fiasco led the Defense Department to appoint an investigative panel to review the mission. Former Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral James L. Holloway, chaired the

commission. The commission studied 23 separate issues in depth, eventually identifying 11 major areas that needed to receive careful consideration at all levels prior to planning any future special operations.⁴ Lack of command and control was identified as the most significant cause of the failure. In response to the findings, the Defense Department established a Special Operations Advisory Panel consisting of active and retired officers with career special operations backgrounds. This solution ultimately failed to cause any significant change, as special operations continued to be controlled along service lines.

In 1983, Operation URGENT FURY in Grenada highlighted continuing interoperability problems between the services and in the integration of SOF into joint operations. Combined with the terrorist bombing in Lebanon that killed 237 Marines, the debate for SOF reform was reignited. Both events highlighted the growing threat of low-intensity conflict and the need for joint interoperability. Also noting the challenges of these events was the Deputy Secretary of Defense, William H. Taft III. He published his concerns in a memorandum to the service chiefs in which he noted the need for revitalizing SOF. Secretary Taft directed the service chiefs to provide the necessary force structure expansion and enhancements in command and control, personnel policy, training, and equipment no later than the end of Fiscal Year 1990.⁵

Concurrent with Defense Department initiatives, there was also a growing sense of interest in Congress to reform the military. In June 1983, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SAC), under the chairmanship of Senator Barry Goldwater, began a two-year long study of the

⁴ Charles M. Sellers, USA, "United States Special Operations Command: How Marine Corps Participation Could Enhance Current Special Operations Capabilities," Masters Thesis, U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Quantico, VA. 1993, 9.

⁵ Kelley, 22.

Department of the Defense. The following year, Senators Sam Nunn and William Cohen of the SAC and Representative Dan Daniel, Chairman of the Readiness Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, were determined to overhaul SOF. Congressman Daniel had become convinced that the U.S. military establishment was not interested in special operations, that the country's capability in this area was second rate, and that SOF operational command and control was an endemic problem. Senator Nunn expressed concern with the Services reallocating monies that were directed for SOF modernization. Senator Cohen believed that SOF needed a clearer organizational focus and chain of command for special operations to function in future low-intensity conflicts.⁶

In October 1985, the Senate Armed Services Committee published the results of its two-year review of U.S. military structure, entitled "Defense Organization: The Need For Change." This study led to the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, and to amendments to reform SOF. During the spring of 1986, SOF reform bills were introduced in both houses of Congress. Senators Cohen and Nunn led the call for a joint military organization for SOF and the establishment of an office within the Department of Defense to oversee funding and mission focus on low-intensity conflict and special operations. Representative Daniel proposed the creation of a national special operations agency. This agency, headed by a civilian, would work directly for the Secretary of Defense. Representative Daniels main concern was to eliminate the Joint Chiefs and the Services from the SOF budgetary process.

⁶ United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Command History* (MacDill Air Force Base, FL: September, 1998), 4.

During the summer of 1986, Congress held hearings and reconciled a single reform bill that called for the creation of a unified combatant command headed by a four-star general for all SOF, an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (ASD (SO/LIC)), a coordinating board for low-intensity conflict within the National Security Council, and a new Major Force Program (MFP 11) specifically for SOF. The final bill, attached to the 1987 Defense Authorization Act, amended the Goldwater-Nichols Act and was signed into law in October 1986.⁷

In order to create the new unified command, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that the United States Readiness Command (USREDCOM) be disestablished to provide billets and facilities for USSOCOM. On 13 April 1987, President Ronald Reagan approved the establishment of the new command. The Department of Defense activated USSOCOM on 16 April 1987 and nominated General Lindsay, former USREDCOM commander, to be the first United States Commander in Chief Special Operations Command (USCINCSOC).⁸

The activation of USSOCOM required the assignment of components and forces. The law establishing USSOCOM stated that, “Unless otherwise directed by the Secretary of Defense, all active and reserve special operations forces of all armed forces stationed in the United States shall be assigned to the Special Operations Command.” The Secretary of Defense, Casper Weinberger, initially assigned three component commands and most of their forces. He assigned to USSOCOM the 23rd Air Force, located at Hurlburt Field, Florida; the Naval Special Warfare

⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁸ Ibid., 5-6.

Command, headquartered at Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, San Diego, California; and the Army's 1st SOCOM, at Ft Bragg, North Carolina. Additionally, Secretary Weinberger assigned the Joint Special Operations Command on 14 August 1987.⁹ As forces were assigned to USSOCOM, one service was conspicuously absent – the United States Marine Corps.

⁹ Ibid., 11.

USMC Resists Force Contribution to USSOCOM

It is not our intention to duplicate the capabilities of any existing SOF organizations, but rather, to provide a complementary capability based on the introduction of forces from the sea—our specialty.¹⁰

-Commandant of the Marine Corps
General P.X. Kelley
October 1985

On 5 February 1985, Representative Dan Daniel sent the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General P.X. Kelley, a memorandum discussing his concerns and ideas on special operations reform. Representative Daniel wrote, “Over the last several years I have begun to view our national inability to conduct successful operations at the lower end of the spectrum of warfare as perhaps our single-most pressing readiness problem.” He went on to say that SOF had proven unable to attract sustained funding, understanding or emphasis in their parent services. Representative Daniel proposed two solutions to the problem: consolidation of SOF under the operational, funding, and doctrinal control of a separate defense agency or consolidation under one service – the most capable being the Marine Corps.¹¹

General Kelley did not believe it was in the best interest of the Marine Corps to own SOF nor did he believe that the Marine Corps had special operations forces to provide to a separate agency. In October 1985, he published his thoughts on the subject in the *Marine Corps Gazette*. General Kelley believed the prudent approach in reviewing the special operations question was to look at three important issues: First to examine in detail the full range of missions that were appropriate within the definition of special operations in order to understand their scope and

¹⁰ Kelley, 23.

¹¹ United States Representative Dan Daniel, Memorandum for General Kelley, *Special Operations Forces/U.S.M.C.*, 5 February, 1985, 1, located in files of MAGTF Special Operations Section at Expeditionary Policy Branch, Plans, Policies and Operations, Headquarters United States Marine Corps (Code POE).

magnitude. Second, all four Services should look within to see what special operations missions could be accomplished by existing conventional forces. Finally, regarding those special operations missions that were beyond the capabilities of existing conventional forces, Special Operations Forces should be organized, trained, and equipped to conduct these missions.¹²

As the Defense Department was conducting its own internal review of special operations, the Deputy Secretary of Defense provided further guidance to the Services on what forces should be part of a consolidated agency, stating that there was to be “no duplication of capabilities amongst the services.” General Kelly believed that there was little they could offer within the context of “no duplication of effort.” The Army was going to provide the land forces, the Air Force was providing the fixed and rotary wing air forces, and the Navy was providing the maritime forces. The leadership’s view was that the Marine Corps did all these things in one form or another, but not in as dedicated or focused a manner.¹³

After conducting an internal review of the Marine Corps, General Kelley drew three conclusions that would drive the Marine Corps official position: First, the review affirmed that the Marine Air Ground Task Force, or MAGTF, was fundamentally sound in the manner in which it was manned, organized, and equipped and its forces were “uniquely qualified” to conduct most special operations in a maritime environment. Second, drawing on the Marine Corps’ less than positive experience with “special units” such as the Raider units during World War II, the review determined that the establishment of new units in the Marine Corps would

¹² Kelley, 22.

¹³ United States Marine Corps (POE-30), Information Paper, *History (Supported by “Hard Data”) as to Why the Marine Corps did not participate in the standup of SOCOM*, 26 September 2002, Revised 5 March 2003, 3, located in files of MAGTF Special Operations Section at Expeditionary Policy Branch, Plans, Policies and Operations, Headquarters United States Marine Corps (Code POE).

constitute unnecessary duplication of sister service organizations. Finally, the Marine Corps would bolster the special operations capabilities of the MAGTF without altering its structure in order to provide “complementary capabilities” to existing special operations forces.¹⁴

As the Cohen-Nunn Act came into fruition and the Secretary of Defense and CINCSOC began manning USSOCOM, the Marine Corps successfully resisted the assignment of forces by arguing that the Marine Corps had no SOF and that the Corps’ force reconnaissance companies were, in fact, the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) commander’s deep reconnaissance capability. The argument was made that relinquishing these assets to USSOCOM would seriously degrade the MAGTF commander’s ability to collect vital intelligence and thus limit his ability to exploit enemy vulnerabilities. Congress concurred with the Marine Corps’ assessment, but only after the Commandant provided Congress with a report on what the Marine Corps could provide in the way of rapid response and special operations capabilities.¹⁵

Although General Kelly didn’t believe that force contribution to special operations was a prudent approach, he did believe that the Marine Corps could provide a special operations capability to the nation. In 1984, General Kelley directed the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Atlantic (CG, FMFLANT), to conduct an examination that entailed making a detailed, objective look at the Marine Corps capabilities, and to make recommendations on the appropriate role of the MAGTF in special operations.¹⁶ The CG, FMFLANT, Lieutenant General Alfred Grey, responded a year later with a special operations study that concluded that

¹⁴ Kelley, 22.

¹⁵ Joseph J. Rogish, Lieutenant Colonel, USMC, “Do Marines belong in USSOCOM?”, *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 1992, 58.

¹⁶ Kelley, 23.

existing Marine Corps roles and missions were rapidly adaptable to maritime special operations.¹⁷

In 1985, the results of the study were incorporated into a test program with an East coast based Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU). The new MAU was re-designated Special Operations Capable (SOC), with incorporated capabilities of being able to perform 18 special operations missions beyond the traditional conventional tasks. These missions included: amphibious raids; limited objective attacks; protection of noncombatants or installations; show-of-force operations; reinforcement operations; security operations; mobile training missions; civil affairs operations; military tactical deception operations; fire support control; counterintelligence operations; initial terminal guidance; signals intelligence/electronic warfare; military operations on urbanized terrain; tactical recovery of aircraft, equipment, and personnel; recovery operations; specialized demolition operations; and *in-extremis* hostage rescues.¹⁸ In addition to the (SOC) label, the Marine Corps renamed MAU to Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) in 1987, to emphasize the expeditionary nature of the MAGTF, and added a Special Operations Training Group (SOTG) to train the MEU(SOC) units for the additional missions.

To accomplish these 18 missions, the structure of the MEU(SOC) was enlarged to include an air and naval liaison company detachment; a direct support artillery battery; a counterintelligence team; a force imagery interpretation unit team; a force recon company detachment; an interrogator/translator detachment; a Low-Altitude Air Defense (LAAD) battery

¹⁷ James G. Magee, Colonel, USMC, and Lieutenant Colonel Gary I. Wilson, USMC, "Maritime Special Operations," *Marine Corps Gazette*, September, 1990, 14.

¹⁸ Victor D. Lance, Major, USMC, "MAGTF(SOC): Time to make it happen," *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 1992, 55.

detachment; a Marine aerial refueler/transport squadron (VMGR) detachment; a Marine Air Support Squadron (MASS) detachment; a AV-8B Harrier detachment; and a radio battalion detachment.¹⁹ While these additions have changed somewhat in composition over the years, the basic organization remains a permanent figure of today's Marine Corps.

¹⁹ Ibid., 55-6.

USMC/USSOCOM Relationship 1992-2003

I believe this is a good time to talk about where USSOCOM and the Marine Corps are going with our respective special operations capabilities and how we can work together to our mutual benefit. I propose that we meet at a mutually convenient time in the near future to discuss roles and missions along the seam that runs between “special operations” and “special operations capable.” I would like to focus on three areas- Hostage Rescue, Maritime Special Operations, and Riverine Operations. I look forward to conducting a series of discussions over time (possibly a USSOCOM/Marine Corps “Board”) so that we can develop the operational and staff relationships needed to address the issues.²⁰

-Commander in Chief Special Operations Command
General Carl W. Stiner
October 1992

The time is right to enhance interoperability between USSOCOM and the Marine Corps in order to prosecute the global war on terrorism and meet future challenges.²¹

-Commandant of the Marine Corps
General James L. Jones
Fall, 2001

In the 1990's, each of the services was undergoing a review of their roles and missions as a by-product of the end of the Cold War and a reduction in the defense budget. With the US Military moving toward low-intensity conflict missions, the Marine Corps created the Coalition and Special Warfare Branch at Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC), located at Marine Corps Base Quantico, to study the problem. This initiative prompted the CINCSOC, General Carl Stiner, to open a dialogue with the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Carl Mundy.

²⁰ Unclassified Message, R091329Z Oct 92, from USCINCSOC to CMC, 1, located in files of MAGTF Special Operations Section at Expeditionary Policy Branch, Plans, Policies and Operations, Headquarters United States Marine Corps (Code POE).

²¹ Power Point Presentation to USMC/USUSSOCOM Board, “USSOCOM-USMC: The Way Ahead,” HQMC (POE-30), August 2002, 1, located in files of MAGTF Special Operations Section at Expeditionary Policy Branch, Plans, Policies and Operations, Headquarters United States Marine Corps (Code POE).

In response to General Stiner's request, General Mundy replied with the following message:

I wholeheartedly concur with your proposal to meet and discuss roles and missions that run along the seam between "special operations" and "special operations capable." We Marines are taking a hard look at where we are headed with our Maritime Special Operations Program and would be very interested in how we can complement your efforts. You are right on target with your focus and challenge to better serve and support the CINC's. The recent establishment of our "Coalition and Special Warfare" branch at MCCDC (Marine Corps Combat Development Command) is where our concept and requirements are generated. As you know, our SOC program has been evolving for over eight years now and there are many complementary areas. Your idea of forming a joint special operations "Board" has great merit as a natural follow-on to our discussions. I would be happy to send a briefing team to explain our SOC program to your staff, if and when you desire.²²

This initial dialogue led to the establishment of a more formal relationship. In 1993, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) for a USMC/USSOCOM Board was signed. This initiative was designed to provide a medium for effective communication between SOF and the Marine Corps. More importantly, it was designed to provide for more effective employment of the complementary capabilities of our nation's crisis response forces.²³

The USMC/USSOCOM Board met six times between 1993 and 1996. The next and final board meeting was held in March 1999. This meeting took place at the action officer level and resulted in no specific recommendations.²⁴ Little documented information is available as to why the Board failed in that regard. Conjecture and speculation have run rampant, however,

²² Unclassified Message, O222000Z Oct 92, from CMC to USCINCSOC, 1, located in files of MAGTF Special Operations Section at Expeditionary Policy Branch, Plans, Policies and Operations, Headquarters United States Marine Corps (Code POE).

²³ United States Marine Corps, *Memorandum of Agreement between the United States Special Operations Command and the United States Marine Corps*, 9 November 2001, 1, located in files of MAGTF Special Operations Section at Expeditionary Policy Branch, Plans, Policies and Operations, Headquarters United States Marine Corps (Code POE).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

including intense competition for mission assignment at the Quadrennial Defense Review; the assignment of the Marine Corps as the Executive Agent for Riverine Warfare in U. S. Southern Command; “covert” Marine Corps efforts to secure MFP-11 funding; the list goes on and on.²⁵

The dormant USMC/USSOCOM relationship was revived following the horrific events of 11 September 2001. In order to meet future challenges, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James L. Jones, recognized the need for closer relations with USSOCOM. In the Fall of 2001, he dispatched the Deputy Commandant for Plans, Policies, and Operations (PP&O), and the Director, Operations, to USSOCOM to present an offer of support for the emerging war on terrorism. This offer included providing liaison officers for operational and planning assistance, defining personnel requirements for follow-on augmentation, and developing an open dialogue between USSOCOM and USMC planners and current operations. The goal was to provide USSOCOM with focused assistance regarding personnel shortages, operational planning, and awareness of Marine Corps capabilities to enhance USSOCOM missions.²⁶

This initiative was so successful, that it led the two organizations to revisit a permanent relationship. On 9 November 2001, the Commandant of the Marine Corps and the CINCSOC, General Charles Holland, signed a new MOA that reconstituted the USMC/USSOCOM Board. The MOA re-established the board to accomplish the following functions:

²⁵ David S. Howe, Major, USMC, “Force Reconnaissance and Special Operations Command: Is it the Right Thing to do?”, Masters Thesis, U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Quantico, VA. 2003. 22.

²⁶ Giles Kyser, Lieutenant Colonel, USMC, “The Corps and USSOCOM—Renewed Links,” *Marine Corps Gazette*, February 2002, 24.

1. To examine current capabilities and missions in order to leverage the unique capabilities of each organization, thus enhancing interoperability.
2. To establish and continue an interface between the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) and deploying Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) staffs.
3. To establish and continue an interface between theater special operations commands (TSOC) and deploying MEU staffs.
4. To synchronize USSOCOM and USMC warfighting developments, as well as material research and procurement initiatives.²⁷

In January 2002, the first USMC/USSOCOM Board was held to explore areas and issues of interoperability across the spectrum of operations and training. The board established nine working groups designed to explore areas of interoperability between the two organizations. The working groups included: operations; training and education; communications/command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence; information operations and psychological operations; civil affairs; intelligence; aviation; future concepts; and equipment/technology.²⁸ The general focus of each of the working groups is as follows:

1. Operations. This group is focused on improving the interoperability of TSOC and ARG/MEU units and overseeing the Marine Corps' initial test regarding force contribution.

²⁷ MOA, 9 Nov 2001, 1-2.

²⁸ Giles Kyser, Lieutenant Colonel, USMC, "Fix Recon, USSOCOM, and the Future of the Corps: Food for Thought," *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 2003, 19.

2. Training and Education. This group focuses on training initiatives between the two organizations to include JSOC and MEU pre-deployment training, wargaming exercises, and professional military education exchanges.

3. Communications/C4. This group focuses on developing interoperable communications architecture and C4 planning systems.

4. Information Operations. This group focuses on integrating the two organizations' information operations capabilities to include developing the Marine Corps' psychological operations (PSYOP) capability and pursuing PSYOP exchange billets.

5. Civil Affairs. This group focuses on integrating the two organizations' civil affairs capabilities to include organization, employment, and deployment.

6. Intelligence. This group focuses on integrating intelligence systems and training.

7. Aviation. This group focuses on the interoperability of Marine aviation assets in support of USSOCOM units.

8. Future Concepts. This group focuses on coordinating the continuing development of USSOCOM and USMC concepts and visions.

9. Equipment and Technology. This group focuses on current joint procurement issues and explores future dual-use items.

In addition to multiple initiatives to improve interoperability through working group interaction, the Commandant of the Marine Corps concurrently responded to a request from the Secretary of Defense regarding what missions and activities might be best transferred to conventional or SOF-like forces. In a letter to the Secretary of the Navy, General Jones listed the 23 missions trained to by the MEU and identified 8 SOF missions or collateral activities that best took advantage of Marine Corps combined arms capabilities. Those missions or activities included: Direct Action (DA); Special Reconnaissance (SR); Coalition Support; Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR); Combating Terrorism (CBT); Foreign Internal Defense (FID); Humanitarian Assistance (HA); and Security Assistance (SA). The Commandant went on to address the re-establishment of the USMC/USSOCOM Board and to discuss a future force contribution initiative. In coordination with USSOCOM and the Naval Special Warfare Command, the Marine Corps was planning on developing an integrated 80-90 man detachment as an initial “proof of concept” force that could serve as the foundation for future contributions.²⁹

²⁹ United States Marine Corps, Memorandum for Secretary of the Navy, *Marine Corps Capabilities to Assist Special Operations Forces in Meeting Emerging Requirements*, Undated, 1-2, located in files of MAGTF Special Operations Section at Expeditionary Policy Branch, Plans, Policies and Operations, Headquarters United States Marine Corps (Code POE).

USMC Contribution to USSOCOM

We are going to provide 85 Marines who have the type, capability and skills that the Special Operations Command can use in their own deployments. We are looking for ways to use Marine forces to go into what was previously SOF missions that we can do and were trained to do, to free up SOF for some of their more specific tasks.³⁰

-Commandant of the Marine Corps
General James L. Jones
Fall 2002

On 20 February 2003, the DC, PP&O, Lieutenant General Emil Bedard, and the Deputy Commander, USSOCOM, Lieutenant General Bryan Brown, signed an MOA regarding the initial Marine Corps force contribution to USSOCOM. This force contribution was named the USMC/USSOCOM Detachment (MCSOCOM Det). The MCSOCOM Det was given the basic mission of augmenting a deploying Naval Special Warfare (NSW) Squadron's capability to conduct special reconnaissance, direct action, coalition support, limited foreign internal defense, and other missions as required in support of joint and fleet commanders in order to test the initial Marine Corps force contribution to USSOCOM. The MOA went on to establish command and control relationships, organization, concept of support, and other administrative manners.³¹

Command Relationships

Command and control arrangements were established so that the MCSOCOM Det would be under combatant command (COCOM) authority of the Commander, U.S. Pacific Command

³⁰ Marine Corps Special Operations Command Detachment One, *Command Brief(Unclassified)*, Undated, <http://www.mfp.usmc.smil.mil/mfpfiles/mcsocomdet1.htm>.

³¹ United States Special Operations Command, Memorandum of Agreement between USSOC and USMC, *Initial Marine Corps Force Contribution to the United States Special Operations Command*, 20 February 2003, 1, located in files of MAGTF Special Operations Section at Expeditionary Policy Branch, Plans, Policies and Operations, Headquarters United States Marine Corps (Code POE).

(CDRUSPACOM), who exercises that command through the Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Pacific (COMMARFORPAC). Six months prior to deployment, a message will be sent from CMC and Commander United States Special Operations Command (COMUSSOCOM) to the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) requesting transfer of the MCSOCOM Det to COMUSSOCOM. COMUSSOCOM will establish an operational control (OPCON) command relationship in order to facilitate joint pre-deployment training, deployment/redeployment, and employment operations. COMUSSOCOM will then exercise OPCON over the MCSOCOM Det through the Commander, Naval Special Warfare Command (COMNAVSPECWARCOM), until the conclusion of the deployment of the NSW Squadron.³²

Organization

The initial Table of Organization of the MCSOCOM Det was eighty-seven Marines and Sailors organized into a Headquarters element, a Fire Liaison element, a Reconnaissance element, and an Intelligence element. The detachment is commanded by a Lieutenant Colonel with a Headquarters element of two Marine officers, twenty enlisted Marines, and one Navy corpsman. The Headquarters element is tasked with providing a task-organized battle staff to plan, provide command and control of and execute assigned missions as well as facilitate liaison, integration, and/or augmentation to a TSOC or a Joint Task Force (JTF).³³

The Reconnaissance element is led by a Captain and consists of one Marine officer, twenty-five enlisted Marines, and four Navy corpsmen, and is organized in four 7-man teams.

³² Ibid., 1.

³³ Marine Corps Special Operations Command Detachment One, *Command Brief(Unclassified)*, Undated, <http://www.mfp.usmc.smil.mil/mfpfiles/mcsocomdet1.htm>, 6, 10.

The Reconnaissance element is tasked with conducting amphibious reconnaissance, special reconnaissance, battlespace shaping, and limited raids in support of the theater combatant command and/or component command TSOC or a joint force.³⁴

The Intelligence element is led by a Major and consists of two Marine officers and twenty-seven enlisted Marines, and is organized into a Radio Reconnaissance team, All-Source Fusion team, and a Human Intelligence (HUMINT) Exploitation team. The Radio Reconnaissance team consists of nine enlisted Marines and is tasked with conducting low level tactical SIGINT/EW and special intelligence communication support from various platforms to provide indications and warning to supported forces as well as develop technical databases to support follow-on operations. The All-Source Fusion team consists twelve Marines and is tasked with conducting all-source intelligence to assist the battlestaff and supported forces in the processing, exploitation, evaluation, analysis, interpretation, production, and dissemination of combat intelligence. Finally, the HUMINT Exploitation team consists of one Marine Officer and five enlisted Marines and is tasked with conducting offensive and defensive counterintelligence activities, including counterespionage, countersabotage, countersubversion, and counterterrorism in support of the command element, supported forces, or a joint force.³⁵

The Fires Liaison element is led by a Major and consists of two Marine officers and four enlisted Marines. The Fire Liaison element is tasked with providing task-organized, trained, and equipped teams to facilitate the planning, coordination, execution, and terminal control of air and

³⁴ Ibid., 6,12.

³⁵ Ibid., 6,14-15,19-20,23-4.

indirect and naval surface fires when operating with SOCOM, joint, and/or allied/coalition forces.³⁶

Training Plan

The training plan for the MCSOCOM detachment is broken down into five phases. Phase I, Activation/Individual Training Phase (Jan-May 2003), focuses on development of basic and advanced skills, development of detachment standard operating procedures (SOPs), and emphasis on formal military schools. Phase II, United Training Phase (Jun-Dec 2003), focuses on allowing the battle staff to train collective team and element skills required to execute special reconnaissance and surveillance, coalition support, battlespace shaping, and direct action missions. Phase III, NSW/MCSOCOM Det integrated training (Jan-Feb 2004), focuses on interoperability of NSW/SOCOM assets in preparation for deployment. During Phase IV, Deployment (Apr-Oct 2004), the Detachment deploys with NSW forces in support of Commander United States Central Command (COMUSCENTCOM) operational war plans and the bilateral exercise program. Finally, during Phase V, Post Deployment (Nov 2004-May 2005), the Detachment conducts administrative and maintenance standdown. Additionally, an overall assessment of the USMC initial force contribution will be conducted.³⁷ In January 2005, the USMC/USSOCOM Board will meet to discuss the results of the “proof of concept” and make a recommendation on the future of force contribution.

³⁶ Ibid., 6, 26-7.

³⁷ Marine Corps Special Operations Command Detachment One, *Mission Training Plan (MTP) for Marine Corps U.S. Special Operations Command Detachment(Unclassified)*, Undated, 2-3.
<http://www.mfp.usmc.smil.mil/mfpfiles/mcsocomdet1.htm>.

Proposed Future

I truly hope the Marine Corps can become a useful member of the USSOCOM team. Many Marines can perform at that level. My concern is that the other 99% of the Corps will not support this effort and will resist it actively.³⁸

-Colonel (Ret) W. Hays Parks
May 2003

Inevitably, any discussion concerning a USSOCOM and Marine Corps relationship boils down to two major issues: interoperability and force contribution. Interoperability, in its broadest sense, means the ability of the two organizations to work together for a common goal. Force contribution, on the other hand, is generally interpreted as the Marine Corps providing dedicated forces to special operations on a permanent basis. Both concepts are important parts in understanding the past, present, and future of the USMC/USSOCOM relationship. Although a link can be made between the two, I believe that each should be viewed on its own merits before committing to a permanent course of action.

Interoperability

The landmark Goldwater-Nichols legislation was designed in large part to force “jointness” upon the Services in order to improve interoperability. The USMC/USSOCOM Board was created with the same goal in mind, to improve interoperability between special operations and the Marine Corps. Both organizations have a wide range of capabilities that contribute to interoperability. In addition to the USMC/USSOCOM Board, interoperability exists in a variety of other areas, to include: permanent and augment billets, exchange programs, and interaction during “real world” operations.

³⁸ W. Hays Parks, Colonel(Ret), USMC, “Should Marines “Join” Special Operations Command?”, United States Naval Institute, *Proceedings*, 129, No 5., May, 2003, 4.

USMC/USSOCOM Board

As discussed earlier, the USMC/USSOCOM Board established eight working groups to coordinate common mission areas and procurement initiatives in order to identify areas of commonality and supportability between the two organizations. Annually, an In-Progress Review (IPR) is held to review initiatives of the working groups. The IPR is designed to support short-term and long-term goals regarding the emerging relationship between the Marine Corps and SOF. Current IPR topics of discussion include: USMC/SOCOM exchange billets; USMC Force Contribution to SOCOM; exchange of USMC/SOCOM capabilities briefs and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) / Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) lessons learned; TSOC and ARG/MEU interaction; SOF interoperability with MEU pre-deployment training plan; USMC/SOCOM wargames and exercises; SOF utilization of the MAGTF Training Center and Mountain Warfare Training Center (MWTC); Joint Mission Essential Tasks Lists (METLs) for aviation training; and collaboration on intelligence production; PSYOP and civil affairs. Additionally, the equipment and technology group has discussed an extensive list of joint procurement initiatives that include the V-22 “Osprey”; short-range UAV; Light Strike Vehicle (LSV); lightweight counter-mortar radar; 40mm High Explosive, Dual Purpose (HEDP) munition with a variable time (VT) fuse; shoulder launched Novel explosive warhead; small lightweight broadcast receiver; C4I equipment; component level Signal Intelligence (SIGINT) systems interoperability; and Chemical/ Biological/Radiological/Nuclear Equipment (CBRNE) collaboration.³⁹

³⁹ United States Marine Corps (PP&O), Unclassified Message, After-Action Report For USSOCOM Marine Corps In-Progress Review (IPR), conducted 29-31 October 2002, 9 December 2002, 1-9.

Permanent and Augment Billets

Currently, the Marine Corps provides support to USSOCOM through assignment of more than 100 individual billets around the world and through staff augmentation to the USSOCOM headquarters in Tampa, the Campaign Support Group, and to Central Commands Theater Special Operations headquarters (SOCCENT).⁴⁰ The most senior of those 100 plus billets is Brigadier General Dennis Hejlik, current Chief of Staff for USSOCOM. He was assigned to the billet in October 2002 as part of the MOA signed by the CMC and COMUSSOCOM.

In addition to permanently staffed billets, the Marine Corps has augmented SOF staffs during the current War on Terrorism (WOT). When operations were beginning in Afghanistan, it became evident that SOCOM would be unable to fill all of its staff officer billets at SOCCENT, the Joint Forces Special Operations Command Center (JFSOCC), and the Joint Special Operations Task Force (JOSOTF) headquarters. Since the Marine Corps had a critical role in OEF operations as well, they offered to help fill critical shortfalls with Marines who had special operations experience.⁴¹

SOCOM accepted the Marine Corps' offer of assistance and assigned the Marines to the staffs of SOCCENT, CJSOTF-S in Masirah, CJTF-KBAR in Kandahar, JFSOCC in Qatar, TF-BOWIE at Bagram, and the Crisis Response Element in Qatar. The active duty and reserve

⁴⁰ United States Marine Corps (POE-30), Information Paper, *Marine Capabilities to Provide Relief to SOF Operational Tempo*, 24 September 2002, 3, located in files of MAGTF Special Operations Section at Expeditionary Policy Branch, Plans, Policies and Operations, Headquarters United States Marine Corps (Code POE).

⁴¹ Mark A. Clark, Lieutenant Colonel, USMC, "Should the Marine Corps expand it's Role in Special Operations?", Strategy Research Project, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA, 2003, 21.

Marines assigned to the various commands not only carried out their assigned duties, they acted as liaison officers in assisting with Marine/SOF interoperability issues when required.⁴²

Exchange Tours

The Marine Corps has an ongoing agreement with USSOCOM to exchange officers for a tour of duty. Since the late 1980's, the Marine Corps has provided helicopter pilots to conduct exchange tours. Currently, a CH-53 pilot serves a tour with the Air Force's 20th Special Operations Squadron (SOS) and a AH-1W pilot is assigned to the Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR). In exchange, the Army's 160th SOAR provides a helicopter pilot to the Marine Corps' Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron-One (MAWTS-1) to serve as an instructor. In addition to exchange tours, the two organizations share exchange programs in professional military education courses. Some other examples of exchange programs are Marines attending courses at JSOC and SOF pilots attending Weapons Training Instructor (WTI) courses at MAWTS-1.

Perhaps the most important example of interoperability between the Marine Corps and special forces is during the execution of "real world" operations. The two organizations have an extensive history of working together and will no doubt continue to do so in the future. Two historical examples that highlight this history are Operations PROVIDE COMFORT and ENDURING FREEDOM.

⁴² Ibid., 21.

Operation PROVIDE COMFORT

After the first Gulf War, Operation PROVIDE COMFORT was one of many operations that demonstrated the interoperability of the Marine Corps and SOF. The humanitarian mission of PROVIDE COMFORT involved the use of both conventional and special operations forces. The 24th MEU(SOC) enabled the introduction and sustainment of the joint task force into northern Iraq. The 24th MEU(SOC) then established a forward arming and refueling point some 450 miles into northern Iraq with 23 helicopters, with security to enable the joint task force to conduct humanitarian assistance to Kurdish refugees. Subsequently, force reconnaissance Marines and Navy Sea Air Land (SEAL)s of the MEU (SOC) maritime special purpose force (MSPF) were inserted deep into Iraq to conduct surveillance of Iraqi forces. Battalion Landing Team 2/8 then conducted a conventional heli-borne assault to establish a security zone for the Kurds. These special and conventional operations were integrated by the MEU(SOC) commander to enable the MEU service support group (MSSG) to provide logistics support to the joint and allied forces to sustain the entire humanitarian effort. The joint and allied forces, including units of USSOCOM, were incapable of sustaining themselves without the logistics capability of the 24th MEU(SOC). Once the humanitarian effort was complete, the 24th MEU(SOC) covered the withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces and then returned to amphibious shipping.⁴³

Operation ENDURING FREEDOM

⁴³ James B. Laster, Captain, USMC, "The Marine Corps' Role in Joint Special Operations: Are We Elite Enough?", *Marine Corps Gazette*, January 1994, 54.

Two Marine Corps Expeditionary Units (26th and 15th) scheduled for normal deployments were rerouted to the Arabian Sea shortly after the events of 11 September 2001. On 20 October, two Marine CH-53E helicopters were used to recover a downed Army Black Hawk. In November, Brigadier General Mattis, the Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) Commander for an exercise in Egypt, was put in charge of the 26th and 15th MEUs to form Task Force 58 (TF-58). Shortly thereafter, TF-58, along with SOF forces from the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force-South (known as Combined Joint Task Force K-Bar (CJTF-KBAR)), established Camp Rhino at a remote airfield south of Kandahar, Afghanistan. While at Kandahar, extensive Sensitive Site Exploitation (SSE), Special Reconnaissance (SR), and Direct Action (DA) missions were conducted against known Taliban and Al-Qaida sites. Along with conducting their own SOF-type missions, the Marines supported TF-KBAR's SSE/SR/DA missions by providing airfield security, patrolling, blocking forces, extensive logistics support, setting up training ranges, communications support through their Joint Task Force Enabler communications suite, Explosive Ordnance Demolitions (EOD) support, and linguist support. The Marines also provided the needed air assets, logistics support, communications augmentation, and mobility assets required to support SOF sustained operations.⁴⁴

Marine Corps aviation supported SOF missions via CH-53E heavy lift support and transport of SOF personnel and supplies, refueled by Marine Corps KC-130s. CH-46s and AH-1Ws also supported coalition SOF through mission support and tactical training. Finally, a detachment of six Marine Corps AV-8B's supported SOF out of Bagram Air Base in

⁴⁴ Clark. 22-3.

Afghanistan. The aircraft were equipped with the new Litening II extended range targeting pod which allowed aircraft to provide SOF personnel with current intelligence.⁴⁵

Recommendation

With the signing of the MOA reconstituting the USMC/USSOCOM Board, the Marine Corps made a conscious decision to increase interoperability with SOF. As with any decision, there were advantages and disadvantages that had to be weighed. A more traditionalist school of thought would view increased interoperability as disadvantageous to the Marine Corps. Those taking this position would argue that the Marine Corps and SOF have separate and distinct roles and missions. Due to these differences, the Marine Corps should not waste limited resources on pursuing increased interoperability.

Proponents of interoperability argue however, that now more than ever our current military environment and future warfighting requirements demand a need for closer interaction. The most obvious advantage of interoperability is increased efficiency on the battlefield. Other advantages include better training exercises, expanded education opportunities, and cost savings in procurement. A final and not so obvious advantage is the benefit to the Marine Corps' reputation. Interoperability initiatives are viewed as improving "Jointness." It never hurts to be seen as a "team player."

While an argument can be made that pursuing a course of increased interoperability with SOF is not in the Marine Corps' best interest, I believe the advantages clearly outweigh the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 23-4.

disadvantages. Traditionalists who believe that SOF and the Marine Corps should exist in separate spheres are missing the larger picture of “jointness” in the WOT. The days of “stovepipe” thinking and service parochialism are quickly coming to an end. In today’s military, all the services need to be able to operate together to support the regional Combatant Commanders. Understanding each service’s culture, abilities, and limitations will make us a better combined force on the battlefield.

Force Contribution

In addition to interoperability, the other commonly raised issue in the USMC/USSCOM relationship is force contribution. Since the inception of USSOCOM, the debate of providing Marines permanently to special operations has ebbed and flowed. Before the Marine Corps makes a final decision on its initial “proof of concept” test with the MCSOCOM Det, all the advantages and disadvantages of force contribution need to be reviewed.

Advantages

1. Jointness. “Jointness” is an advantage of interoperability that can also be applied to force contribution. Whether publicly stated or not, the general consensus when the Marine Corps didn’t contribute forces to USSOCOM in 1987 was that the Marine Corps wasn’t being a “team player.” Fueling that fire was the creation of MEUs with the tag of special operations capable (SOC). By contributing forces to USSOCOM, the Marine Corps can go a long way towards building a closer “joint” relationship.

2. Fix Reconnaissance. When General Jones was Commandant, one of his major initiatives was to fix shortfalls in the Marine Corps' reconnaissance community. Creating a permanent Marine Occupational Specialty (MOS), stabilizing rotations of Marines assigned to reconnaissance, and improving reconnaissance education and training, were all seen as ways to fix the problem. Additionally, contributing force reconnaissance Marines to USSOCOM would expand the role of Marine reconnaissance in both the Marine Corps and in the joint community.⁴⁶ It is also believed that reconnaissance Marines can benefit from SOF schools and training and can then provide that experience back to the regular operating forces upon their return from a tour of duty.

3. Cost. During the initial "proof of concept", the Marine Corps pays for all the costs associated with the MCSOCOM Det. If the Marine Corps decides to permanently provide a contribution to USSOCOM, that force will be partially funded by USSOCOM. USSOCOM has its own budget with MFP-11. All SOF peculiar costs are funded by this budget. There would be significant cost savings to the Marine Corps by training and equipping a force under USSOCOM.

4. Solves the "fear-factor". Providing a force to USSOCOM would alleviate many of the fears that currently exist in the Marine Corps regarding USMC/SOF integration. The more common concerns include: preventing SEALs from creeping in on missions that the Marine Corps should be doing; eliminating the need for SF units to encroach on Expeditionary Strike

⁴⁶ Giles Kyser, Lieutenant Colonel, USMC, "Fix Recon, USSOCOM, and the Future of the Corps: Food for Thought," *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 2003, 17.

Group (ESG) shipping; and allowing the MEUs to be a more visible asset for a Combatant Commander to employ.

Disadvantages

1. Redundant Mission. The first issue that most opponents of force contribution will raise is the mission of the MCSOCOM Det. Specifically, their mission statement is to conduct special reconnaissance, direct action, coalition support, and limited foreign internal defense. These missions are currently tasked to SF and SEAL units (See Annexes A&B). Other than being Marines, what capability will the MCSOCOM Det provide to USSOCOM that it doesn't already have? If the answer is augmenting the capabilities of SF units, then why doesn't USSOCOM increase its personnel end-strength? If USSOCOM is unable to recruit more operators, then why can't a conventional force take some of their missions or augment them when necessary like the Marine Corps did in Afghanistan? Answers to these questions should be addressed before we take personnel away from a required mission and commit them to an apparently redundant one.

2. Cost. Another disadvantage of force contribution is cost to the Marine Corps in money and resources. The initial "proof in concept" test is completely funded by the Marine Corps. At this point, the budget for this experiment is not being revealed. Even a conservative estimate would put the cost of schools, ammunition, and equipment alone at more than an infantry battalion's annual budget. Additionally, the hidden cost of force contribution is the loss of a tremendous amount of experience to the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) commander. The MCSOCOM Det's average experience is as follows: Recon Element – 13 years active service;

Fires Element – 12 years; All-Source Fusion Team – 8 years; HUMINT Exploitation Team – 10 years; and Radio Recon Team – 8 years.⁴⁷ Nearly all of the 87 Marines and sailors assigned to the MCSOCOM Det are officers or staff non-commissioned officers. The MEF commander losses tremendous experience in his already limited force structure. This cost in personnel cannot be easily replaced.

3. Elite culture. The Marine Corps has had a history of creating an “elite culture” within an “elite culture.” History has shown that this concept has not worked very well. Time and time again the Marine Corps has found that the basic Marine can train to skills required of the mission. While Marines may not have the skill level of some special operations units, they don’t need to have those skills in order to accomplish their assigned mission. When Marines require more specific skills, they train to them. As MEUs showcase today, a conventional force can train to 23 special missions, execute a deployment, then rotate back to a conventional force training cycle. Creating another “elite culture” is not something the Marine Corps needs for recruiting, retention, or ego.

4. Myth of a “great” investment. The belief that the Marine Corps can send Marines to a MCSOCOM Det, have them gain experience, and then return them to the operating forces to teach and train, is a questionable proposition. One of the greatest strengths of a special operations unit is that once members are assigned, they stay in the special operations community. The argument regarding needing experience to become a special operator is the same one made to keep them in a special operations billet. How many SF or SEAL operators return to their

⁴⁷ Marine Corps Special Operations Command Detachment One, *Command Brief(Unclassified)*, Undated, <http://www.mfp.usmc.smil.mil/mfpfiles/mcsocomdet1.htm>, 12, 14, 20, 22, 24, 26.

Services on a “B” billet? The answer is, none. The time, money, and effort spent to train them is too significant. An assignment to a special operations unit runs counter-culture to the “well rounded” Marine concept.

Recommendation

After weighing the advantages and disadvantages of force contribution, I believe that it is not in the Marine Corps’ best interest to agree to any force contribution. Once the initial “proof of concept” test is completed in Jan 2005, it should be terminated. While there are certainly some benefits to being a part of the special operations community, there are too many disadvantages to invest our efforts in this direction. Most of the advantages can be realized through increased interoperability without having to provide a “buy-in” to USSOCOM.

More importantly, we need to ask ourselves what has changed between the mid-1980’s and now? The issues that General Kelley raised when evaluating the need to contribute forces to special operations are as valid today as they were then. What then is the driving need to contribute a force to special operations? Is it a by-product of transformation? Does the Marine Corps see a need to re-package its capabilities in order to be more effective in the WOT? The MAGTF Special Operations Section at Headquarters Marine Corps would have you believe that force contribution is absolutely necessary. Their recommended Marine Corps position is “given the current nature of warfare, the maturity and success of the Special Operations Command and MFP-11 and the potential for long-term benefits for the Marine Corps from the perspective of interoperability, technology, career growth and protection of roles and missions, improving our relationship with USSOCOM and committing forces on a permanent basis is an appropriate

change to the Marine Corps position.”⁴⁸ What in this recommended position convinces someone that force contribution is a necessity? It seems to me that for the investment value, the efforts we are pursuing in increased interoperability will achieve these same results.

⁴⁸ United States Marine Corps (POE-30), Information Paper, *History (Supported by “Hard Data”) as to Why the Marine Corps did not participate in the standup of SOCOM*, 26 September 2002, Revised 5 March 2003, 3, located in files of MAGTF Special Operations Section at Expeditionary Policy Branch, Plans, Policies and Operations, Headquarters United States Marine Corps (Code POE).

Conclusions

This paper has examined the Marine Corps' past, present, and future relationship with SOF. It accomplished this task by discussing the historical background of the unification of special operations under USSOCOM; why the Marines Corps chose not to contribute forces to USSOCOM; how the relationship between the Marines Corps and USSOCOM has evolved; what the Marine Corps' current experiment in force contribution is; and what I believe the future relationship of the two organizations should be. Lastly, this paper answers the question of whether increased interoperability necessitates force contribution.

I believe that through increased interoperability, the Marine Corps and USSOCOM can gain a better understanding of each organizations' culture, abilities, and limitations. Closer ties will ultimately lead to a better combined force on the battlefield. As for force contribution, I do not believe it is in the best interest of the Marine Corps to pursue this initiative after the "proof of concept" test. Most of the advantages can be realized through increased interoperability without having to provide a "buy-in" to USSOCOM.

Both the Marine Corps and USSOCOM offer unique and beneficial missions to the nation. In today's WOT, the ability to work together will be as critical as ever. For a period of time, the Marine Corps may have to assist SOF in the conduct of their assigned missions: increased interoperability between the Marine Corps and USSOCOM will assist in accomplishing this reality.

ANNEX A

USSOCOM Today

USSOCOM plans, directs and executes special operations in the conduct of the War on Terrorism in order to disrupt, defeat, and destroy terrorist networks that threaten the United States, its citizens and interests worldwide. USSOCOM organizes, trains, and equips Special Operations Forces provided to Geographic Combatant Commanders, American Ambassadors and their Country Teams.⁴⁹

-USSOCOM Mission
2003-2004

USSOCOM is one of nine combatant commands directly responsible to the President and Secretary of Defense. As a functional combatant command, USSOCOM has been given the lead responsibility for waging war on terrorism. Its duties in connection with this responsibility include planning, directing, and executing special operations in the conduct of the war on terrorism. USSOCOM also provides SOF to support the Geographic Combatant Commander's theater security cooperation plans. The designation of Special Operations as a Major Force Program (MFP) makes USSOCOM unique among the nine combatant commands in that it has service-like responsibilities to organize, train, and equip its forces for special operations missions.⁵⁰ USSOCOM has three component commands and one sub-unified command assigned to it: U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM), Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), and Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) (Figure 1).

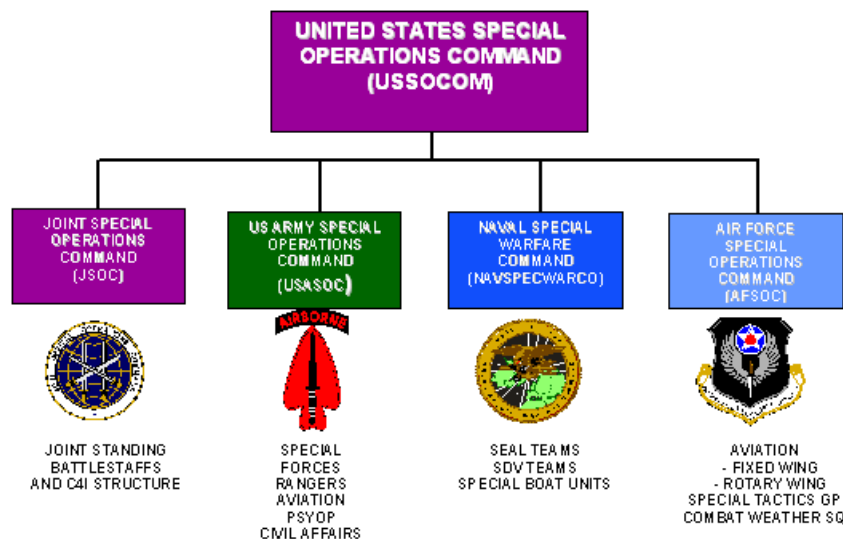


Figure 1: USSOCOM Organizational Chart⁵¹

⁴⁹ United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Forces, Posture Statement 2003-2004*, MacDill Air Force Base, FL, Undated, 4.

<http://www.defenselink.mil/policy/solic>.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁵¹ United States Special Operations Command, Power Point Presentation given by LTC Gray to Command and Staff College, JSOU, 8 January 2004, 12.

USASOC is located at Ft Bragg, North Carolina. The mission of USASOC is to organize, train, man, equip, educate, maintain combat readiness, and deploy assigned active duty and Reserve Components of the Army Special Operations Force. Their mission is to accomplish special operations, psychological operations, and civil operations as assigned by the Commander, USSOCOM and/or Geographic Combatant Commanders employing SOF. Their forces include the United States Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (Airborne), United States Special Forces Command (Airborne), John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, and the Special Operations Support Command, located at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; the 7th Ranger Regiment located at Fort Benning, Georgia; and the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment located at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.⁵²

Two Major Subordinate Commands (MSC) within USASOC are United States Special Forces Command (Airborne) – USASFC(A) and the 75th Ranger Regiment. The mission of USASFC(A) is to train, validate and prepare special forces (SF) units to deploy and execute operational requirements for the U.S. military's Geographic Combatant Commanders throughout the world. SF units perform five doctrinal missions: foreign internal defense, unconventional warfare, special reconnaissance, direct action, and counterterrorism.⁵³ The 7th Ranger regiment is the premier light-infantry unit of the United States Army. Their mission is to plan and conduct joint special military operations in support of U.S. policy and objectives. Ranger capabilities include: infiltration and exfiltration by land, sea, and air; direct action operations; raids; recovery of personnel and special equipment; and conventional or special light infantry operations.⁵⁴

Naval Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM) is located at Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado, CA. The mission of NAVSPECWARCOM is to organize, train, man, equip, educate, maintain combat readiness, and deploy assigned forces in support of joint and fleet operations worldwide. Naval Special Warfare (NSW) forces include Naval Special Warfare Groups ONE and THREE in California; Naval Special Warfare Groups TWO and FOUR in Virginia; and Naval Special Warfare Reserve units located throughout the United States. Their mission is to accomplish special operations as assigned by the Commander, USSOCOM, and Geographic Combatant Commanders employing SOF.⁵⁵

Major Subordinate Commands within NAVSPECWARCOM are the Sea Air and Land (SEAL) teams, SEAL Delivery Vehicle (SDV) Teams, and Special Boat Teams. SEAL Teams are maritime, multipurpose combat forces organized, trained and equipped to conduct a variety of special missions in all operational environments and threat conditions. SEAL special mission areas include: unconventional warfare, direct action, counterterrorism, special reconnaissance, foreign internal defense, information warfare, security assistance, counter-drug operations, personnel recovery, and hydrographic reconnaissance. SDV Teams are specially trained SEALs and support personnel who operation and maintain SDVs, Dry Dock Shelters (DDS), and the Advanced SEAL Delivery System (ASDS). SDV Teams provide clandestine reconnaissance,

⁵² United States Special Operations Command, *United States Special Operations Forces, Posture Statement 2003-2004*, MacDill Air Force Base, FL, Undated, 12, <http://www.defenselink.mil/policy/solic>.

⁵³ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 12-13.

direct actions and passenger delivery capability in maritime environments. Special Boat Teams are specially trained teams that operation and maintain Rigid Inflatable Boats, MK-V Special Operations Craft, and riverine craft used to conduct coastal patrol and interdiction and support special operations missions. They focus primarily on infiltration and exfiltration of SEALs and other SOF into shallow water areas.⁵⁶

Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) is located at Hurlburt Field, Florida. The command is committed to provide Air Force Special Operations Forces for worldwide deployment and assignment to geographic unified commands, conducting the full spectrum of special operations core tasks. AFSOC active duty forces are the 16th Special Operations Wing, 720th Special Tactics Group, 18th Flight Test Squadron, 352nd Special Operations Group, and 353rd Special Operations Group. Reserve Component forces are the 193rd Special Operations Wing (Air National Guard), 280th Combat Communications Squadron (Air National Guard), 123rd Special Tactics Squadron (Air National Guard), and the 919th Special Operations Wing (Air Force Reserve). AFSOC's unique active duty, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve units provide a global ability to conduct special operations missions ranging from precision application of firepower, to infiltration, exfiltration, resupply, and refueling of SOF operational elements. Other unique capabilities include airborne radio and television broadcast for psychological operations and combat aviation advisors for development of other government military expertise.⁵⁷

Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) is a sub-unified command of USSOCOM. JSOC provides a joint headquarters to study special operations requirements, ensures interoperability and equipment standardization, develops joint special operations plans and tactics, and conducts joint special operations exercises and training.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., 20-1.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 13, 24.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 13.

ANNEX B

Definitions of SOF Core Tasks

Special Operations Forces train to nine core tasks: Counterterrorism (CT), Counterproliferation (CP) of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), Special Reconnaissance (SR), Direct Action (DA), Unconventional Warfare (UW), Information Operations (IO), Psychological Operations (PSYOP), Foreign Internal Defense (FID), and Civil Affairs Operations (CAO).⁵⁹ The nine tasks encompass the following:

Combating Terrorism (CBT): produces effective protective measures to reduce the probability of a successful terrorist attack against U.S. interests. This task involves offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, preempt, and respond to terrorism. SOF are specifically organized, trained, and equipped to conduct covert, clandestine, or discreet CT missions in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments. These missions include, but are not limited to intelligence operations, attacks against terrorist organizations, and non-kinetic activities aimed at the ideologies or motivations that spawn terrorism.⁶⁰

Counterproliferation (CP) of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD): refers to actions taken to support DOD and other governmental agencies to prevent, limit, and/or minimize the development, possession, and employment of weapons of mass destruction, new advanced weapons, and advanced-weapon-capable technologies. The major objectives of DOD policy are to prevent acquisition of WMD and missile capabilities (i.e., preventive defense), roll back proliferation where it has occurred, deter the use of WMD and their delivery systems, and adapt U.S. military forces and planning to operate against threats posed by WMD and their delivery systems. SOF provide unique capabilities to monitor and support DOD policy.⁶¹

Special Reconnaissance (SR): reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted as special operations in hostile, denied or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance, employing military capabilities not normally found in conventional forces. These actions provide an additive capability for commanders and may supplement other intelligence collection when conventional reconnaissance and surveillance actions are limited by weather, terrain, or adversary countermeasures.⁶²

Direct Action (DA): the conduct of short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions conducted as a special operation in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets of strategic or operational significance, employing specialized military capabilities. Direct action differs from conventional offensive actions in the level of physical and political risk, operational techniques, and the use of discriminating force to achieve specific objectives.⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid., 28.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

Unconventional Warfare (UW): a broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of a long duration. UW is predominately conducted by, with, or through indigenous or surrogate forces who are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source. UW includes guerilla warfare and other direct offensive, low-visibility, covert, or clandestine operations, as well as the indirect activities of subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and unconventional assisted recovery.⁶⁴

Information Operations (IO): actions taken to influence, affect or defend information, information systems and decision-making.⁶⁵

Psychological Operations (PSYOP): planned operations to convey truthful information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately, the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of PSYOP is to introduce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behaviors favorable to originator's objectives.⁶⁶

Foreign Internal Defense (FID): participation by civilian or military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization to free their society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency. SOF's primary contribution to this interagency activity is to organize, train, advise, and assist host-nation (HN) military and para-military forces. The goal is to enable these forces to maintain the HN's internal stability, to counter subversion and violence in their country, and to address the causes of instability.⁶⁷

Civil Affairs Activities (CA): operations consisting of civil affairs (CA) activities and specialized support provided to commanders responsible for conducting civil military operations (CMO). CA activities involve establishing and conducting military government or civil administration until civilian authority or government can be restored or transitioned to other appropriate authorities. CA supports CMO by focusing efforts to minimize civilian interference with military operations and limit the adverse impact of military operations on civilian populations and resources.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 37.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

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